

A Short Apology for Humane Learning.

W. B. Roper 45.

1474. C

BEING A

SERMON

Preached before the

GENTLEMEN Educated at

St. Paul's School,

Upon the 26th of January 1701.

By William Bramston Late Fellow of Queens
College in Cambridge, and at present
Preacher at St. Clement-Danes.

London, Printed by William Redmayne, and to be
Sold by Abel Roper at the Black Boy in Fleetstreet,
and George Strahan at the Golden Ball over against
the Royal Exchange in Cornhill, 1701.



To My Worthy Friends

The STEWARDS of St. Paul's School Feast.

John Tayler, <i>Gent.</i>	John Holloway, <i>Gent.</i>
Thomas Fowke, <i>Gent.</i>	Edward Gibbon, <i>Esq;</i>
Edward Alexander, <i>Gent.</i>	Mr. Samuel Smithin.
Henry Lovibond, <i>Gent.</i>	George Huxley, <i>Gent.</i>

Gentlemen,

WHen you were pleased to determine me to this Exercise, I receiv'd your Request with all the readiness imaginable, because I esteem'd it a common Debt of Gratitude, to offer some Sacrifice, or other, to the Services of a Society, which, I have the Honour to be so nearly related to: But I must beg your leave to declare, you have not my heart so much, in publishing those Meditations now, which are really huddled, and unaccurate; nor cou'd they be other, by reason of the extraordinary Engagements, I was accidentally hurried with, the Week before your Meeting, the time, I had resolv'd on for this Performance. I must say my Inclinations to oblige you, were too strong for my concern, for my own Reputation.

I confess Sermons are such a Drug at present, that I had no disposition to add to the glut; like the Ministers sent to Preach them, they are generally despised, as a
A 2 publick

Dedication.

publick grievance and nuisance of our State: In my Opinion, as God can be suppos'd to continue the Holy Order of his Stewards and Messengers, amongst such profane Abusers of the Holy Function, only to heap Coals of Fire upon a Vicious and Atheistical World; so his Divine Providence seems to load such an unthankful Age with the plenties of Sermons, on purpose, that they may one Day rise up in Judgment against such a Generation, which in its daily contempt of God's Word and Ministry, daily testifies its contempt of Religion, and neglect of all holy Things.

I hope you believe that some Good, or other, may possibly come, either to the World in general, or your own particular Society by the Publication of this, be pleas'd to concur in promoting that, and I shall never think much, of the few Minutes Labour here presented to you,

By Your Most Affectionate

and Faithful Servant

W. BRAMSTON.

TO AP60

Romans X. II.

For I bear them Record, that they have a Zeal of God, but not according to Knowledge.

THE Holy Apostle begins the foregoing Chapter with the most compassionate Expressions of Love for the *Jews*, he manifests the greatest Sorrow, and Heaviness for their Infidelity, because they wou'd not be reconcil'd to, and so be made partakers of the glorious Comforts of the Gospel: Wherein his heavenly flame of Love raised him to that stupendious height of Compassion; I could wish that my self were accursed from Christ for my Brethren, my Kinsmen, according to the Flesh: And in this Chapter he seems to fix the Reason of his wonderful Bowels towards them, not only in this particular, that they were his Brethren, but in this consideration likewise, that they really had a Zeal of God, saying, *For I bear them Record, that they have a Zeal of God*, which Expression presents us with these two Observations.

1st. That for the faithful Worshippers of God, to bear a Zeal for his blessed Truths, a Spirit earnest to have all his holy Commandments embraced and obeyed, even in the Judgment of God's cho'en Vessel, is a Temper fit to engage, a Temper fit to exercise the Praises of the Holy Ghost.

2dly. That though Men have a Zeal even of God, yet whilst it is without Knowledge, that is, employed in such things, which are rather
 lecht

fetcht from the Fountain of Man's own fancy and affectation, than the Revelation of God, that only Foundation of divine Knowledge, it ought to be entertain'd with the dislike, and discountenance of God's holy Servants.

The method then which I shall follow, in treating upon the words read, shall consist of these two or three particulars.

1st. I shall offer a word by way of Justification, of the reasonableness of our having a becoming Zeal for the things of God, in opposition to the present Apprehensions of many Men, who expose every Zealot for Religion, as a Man void of Sense and Knowledge.

2dly. Since the blessed Spirit of God does advise, that Knowledge is the only right Foundation of our Zeal, I shall with all the clearness I can, set before you the use and excellency of Knowledge, not only as it stands in opposition to Infidelity, or want of Faith in Christ, in which Sense the holy Apostle intends it here, but also as is more suitable to this present Occasion, as it is oppos'd to the want of human Learning.

3dly. I shall endeavour to propose something which may be agreeable to the Intentions of our present Meeting; because the time will not permit me to speak to all these particulars, I will pass by the first of them wholly, and proceed to the second, to set before you the use and excellency of Knowledge, as it stands in opposition to the want of human Learning.

Many Men in these last and worst Ages, are so far from admitting the want of human Learning, to be oppos'd to that Knowledg which is to bound

our

our zeal of God, that they would have us banish all human Learning, as the very bane and poison of Religion, and of our belief of God's Truths; as if our Experience and Knowledge of the ways of all his visible Creatures, must be an obstruction to our approaching our invisible Creator: Whereas on the contrary, the Apostle hath taught us, that the invisible things of God are clearly to be seen and understood, by the things that are made, that is, by the Examination of the various and wonderful Frame of his Creatures, even his very eternal Power and Godhead: Alas! human Learning in the proper use and application of it, is so far from prejudicing our Souls against the most sensible Impressions of Religion, that we might easily demonstrate, had we time, that such Knowledge originally sprang from Religion; was the very Care and Propagation of God's own People the *Jews*, whose illustrious Leaders, if you believe *Patricius*, first furnish'd the World with Schools, and the Invention of Arts and Sciences: It was *Jewry*, to whose sublime hints, *Athens* first, and *Rome* afterwards, ow'd some of the greatest Beauties of their Knowledge; for, as we find it set forth by *Clemens*, *Eusebius*, and *St. Augustine*, all Learning was primitive among the *Hebrews*, *Enoch*, and *Sem*, *Eber*, and *Abraham*, all Men of the greatest Learning, were many Centuries of Years before the *Greek* Philosophers; and *Moses*, as is acknowledged by *Plutarch*, and *Diodorus Siculus*, Eight Hundred Years before *Orpheus*, the first Poet among the *Gentiles*; and therefore certainly that Spirit of God, which
in

in some Measure moved and influenced his People, and filled them with this wholesome thirst after secular Knowledge, cannot oblige us to stifle and extinguish the same rational Inclinations in our selves, for had the Knowledge of the Wonders; and Operations, and Passages of the World, naturally mislead Men from God, we should never have traced the Foundations of it up as high as the best and wisest of God's own Inheritance.

Indeed I don't imagine, that the wisdom of Philosophy, or the understanding of *Greece* or *Rome*, can now add Lustre or Demonstration to the most simple Verities of the Revelations of Christ; yet the very Books of the Heathens may possibly create in us an Admiration of the Wisdom of our Redeemer, when we compare the lofty Improvements of his divine Spirit, with the fainter Glances of their natural Reflections, and so oblige us to confess of his Words, what his most inveterate Enemies did of his Deeds, that no Man could speak the things which he spake, unless God were with him: Ay and they may supply us too with the most irrefutable Arguments against Heathenism itself: Was it not thus that *Tertullian*, *Cyprian*, *Lactantius*, and all the Greek Apologists, silenced the Boldest Reasoners from the Absurdities, as it were out of the Mouths of their own Abettors, demonstrated the necessity of one God, and brought many to the acknowledgment and Adoration of his Christ.

If the Study and Examination of profane Authors had been judged by the primitive Professors of our Faith, as useless and unedifying, as some
weak

weak Christians of late have endeavour'd to persuade; we must have lost many incomparable Volumes of the most excellent among the Fathers, and they fallen short of the most glorious Opportunities of triumphing over Infidelity: For certainly no Argument can be so pungent against an Enemy, as such a one, which we fetch from himself, no conviction more lasting and forcible, than that out of a Man's own Mouth: Thus it was that St. *Paul* shamed the *Cretians* by their own Character, given of them by *Epimenides* their own Prophet; and thus *Dionysius Areopagita*, as St. *Ambrose* conjectures, was partly converted by a Sentence of the same Apostle, fetcht from *Aratus*: If we are to seek no farther than the Scriptures, as some blind Leaders have suggested, how should we ever be able to convert those Infidels, who deny the Scriptures, and thrust those lively Oracles of God, beneath the foolishest Works of their own Infidelity. Again, if St. *Paul* thought it were no diminution to the Powers of the Holy Ghost, to appeal to *Ethnicks*, in his Contentions with *Ethnicks*, even at that time when he was possess'd with the fullest Measures of that blessed Spirit, is it to be esteem'd a betraying the glorious Treasures of spiritual Wisdom in the first Assertors of our Religion, or in us now, in imitation of their Examples, first to search the Books, and then confound Heathenism by some of their own Positions.

I don't conceive indeed, that we may be able to meet the Truth of an eternal Trinity, in the faint and inconsistent Flashes, either of *Plato*, *Cicero*, or *Homer*, but that universal agreement

B

of

of all People and Nations in the acknowledgment of a God, which we find recorded by *Tully*, must be enough to silence the Contradictions of our present Atheists: And *Homer's* surprising guesses at the state of the dead in another World, very rationally expose not only the Fancies of *Epicurus*, but also of all his later Admirers, who with him, would have us believe all human Being to cease with this breath: Nor will all the Subtilties of the *Stoicks*, or any of our modern Revivers of their Notions, who, with so much Application labour to rid the World of the Belief and Doctrine of a Providence, be able to stand the Test, and bear the Reasonings of *Plato*, that Attick *Moses*, as some will stile him, whilst he pleads the Cause of Providence, and by his natural and easie Illustrations, forces Mankind to confess what the gracious Revelation of Christ has, since most irresistably open'd to us, namely, that there is not a Mote, not a Hair of our Heads so minute and inconsiderable, which God does not mind and order. What! are the Principles of our Christian Faith so loose or precarious, that they must easily be blown off, by every puff of Philosophy, should we look into it? or rather on the contrary, must it not in some Sense give strength to the very Life and Powers of God's Word, when we see the most glorious Evidences therein, often acknowledged by the weaker Testimonies of Nature? perhaps thou art scandalized at all Learning, because some ignorant Dreamers tell thee that *Mercury* was the Inventer of Letters; but be it so, must not thou upon the same Principle be obliged to reject the blessed
acts

acts of Justice, nay to despise the whole train of Virtues, when it is most certain, that the *Gentile* World did raise up and dedicate Temples to the Worship of them, which in my Opinion was the most commendable Work of their Ignorance. But to dismiss Philosophy, which I confess rather demonstrates the Perplexities and Confusions of Atheism, than the unity of the Godhead, rather shews the necessity of one eternal being, in the contradictions of its own Polutheism, than leads us to his worship: Philosophy, I say, which demonstrates the ignorance of Nature, and the blindness of human Reason, even in its loftiest Pride and Ambition; when we have dismiss this *Diana* of the *Gentiles*, must we forgoe likewise all the Fathers and Writers of Christianity? must *Aristotle* and *Athanasius*, *Cicero* and *Cyprian*, be alike fatal and dangerous to the Knowledge of the Christian? because we are warn'd in some places of holy Writ, against the Subtilties and Artifice, the Corruptions and Traditions of the ignorant World, does it follow, that we stand bound upon pain of our belief in God, to avoid the most glorious Asserters of our Faith, to fly from the Writings of the most acute and irresistible Defenders of its Truths; whose cogency of Wit, and vehemency of Argument, have either shamed or silenced the insolent Oppugners of God's Majesty? O strange! that any Men should think the way to God, lies in the Paths of Ignorance, think that the readiest means to approach his infinite Knowledge, is for us to eschew all the opportunities of increasing understanding: Men indeed will tell us that Ignorance is the Mother of De-

B 2

votion,

votion, but unless they mean by Devotion, Superstition, and Idolatry, that is, the Worship of Creatures, to which I confess Ignorance naturally betrays Mankind, they shamefully discover their own weakness who say so: For a spiritual and conscientious Adoration of the true and only God, who is a Spirit, must be the Product, either of the enlivening Motions of the Grace of God, working in the Hearts of rational Men, or of the most consummate Knowledge and Understanding, convinced by the very demonstrations of the things that are made by his infinite Power and Wisdom. We hear indeed *St. Paul* declaring (and his words are often urged as an Objection against that Knowledge I am now speaking for) I am determin'd not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified; that is, I resolved when I came amongst you, with the gracious Message of Redemption, not to appear solicitous, either to know or teach you any other Doctrine, than the simple Truths of Christ Jesus, and him Crucified, teach it, as a Foundation fit or capable to bear the exceeding and glorious weight of that Faith, which worketh unto Salvation: But then the Apostle doth not herein labour to abridge Mankind the Advantages of Arts and Sciences, the Opportunities of establishing their own Ways, through the Experience and Wisdom of foregoing Ages, by the Knowledge of which, is many times attain'd, not only the security of our present Conversation in the World, but the most graceful Embellishments of rational Creatures: The pure design and intention of his Expression, is to teach us that our Faith

Faith must be bounded by the Wisdom of the Gospel, that it is to stand, not in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God: Now, though we are not to ground our Faith in God, or to suffer it to rest, upon the Wisdom of Man, yet I hope we may examin into, and make use of the common Principles and Suggestions of Reason in our way to God: To illustrate what I say, no doubt the Authority of *Aratus* is much too weak and feeble to ground this plain Truth, and blessed Principle of our holy Faith upon, namely, in God we live, and move, and have our being, which as the Apostle infers, he manifestly acknowledg'd, when he own'd we were God's Off-spring: But then this acknowledgment of his may be a good motive to influence an Ethnick like himself, nay, in time, bring such a one to acknowledge and embrace that Almighty Prophet, which is the Lord Jesus, because he reveals God to be, what their own Prophet thus represents him to be, namely, the Creator of all Men, that the Apostle had no such thoughts that the Christian stands bound to confine all his Learning and Knowledge within the bare Letter of the Scriptures, is undeniably demonstrated, from the use which he himself makes of profane Authorities upon many Occasions, as well as from his way of reasoning in this Place.

We meet some illiterate People elevated with a persuasion of their own spirituality and skill in divine matters, who, though they never read farther than their Bible, confidently oppose their own personal Abilities against human Learning, and being really ignorant themselves, would oblige

lige the Christian World to alike Ignorance and Blindness; but can any thinking Man believe Learning to be the way to Error, or that the more a Man is conversant with the Opinions and Practices of all the Ages of Christianity, the more likely he must be to be seduced from Christ, or become a Prey to Error and Corruption?

Indeed were the original evidences of Christianity to be repeated, and begin a new in every Generation, were the same Measures of God's blessed Spirit which light upon the Apostles, to rest and abide with the Doctors of every Age, the use of all other Authorities, besides the bare Dictates of the Spirit, must necessarily cease, we should then want neither Fathers nor Histories to set us right as to the Practices of God's ancient Church; nay, there could then be no such thing properly speaking, as Age, and the ancient Authorities of our Predecessors, which ought to influence or over-rule the present times, because the same Spirit, with the same Portion and Degrees of it, must be an abundant evidence for whatever point we maintain, and equally justify every Generation in what it believes, but this is not our Case at present, we profess that Faith which was once above Sixteen Hundred Years ago, and never shall again be so delivered to the Saints; God sent his Spirit once, without promise of any second coming of him, save in Judgment, that blessed Comforter then establish'd the whole Revelation of God, and put his Seal to his holy Word, as that Truth which is to continue and stand for ever, this Faith the holy Apostles then received from the Mouth of the holy Jesus, by the immediate Com-

Communications and Miracles of his Spirit, but it is now to be got and preserved by us, by Prayers, Study, and the humble Applications of an honest Endeavour, by the use of our Ears, and exercise of our Eyes and Minds, in the blessed Lines of Life, and by the Labours and Instructions of God's holy Officers, and therefore that Knowledge which lets us into the Wisdom and Doctrines of God's ancient Church, call it profane, or what you will, must have its infinite Advantages in the concerns of Religion.

It is true all Truths, particularly all necessary and essential Truths, are undoubtedly contained in that comprehensive Word, which was once given by the Inspiration of the Holy Ghost; but then those various Schisms, Heresies, and Contradictions, which *Satan* hath raised in the Church, which have ruffled and disputed some of the most essential Glories of our Redeemer, have made even those necessary Truths, in some Measure less discernable to us, than they were at first, when they were delivered by word of Mouth, and attested by Signs and Wonders, and so brought things to that difficulty at present, which requires the usage and practice of the more purer Ages to illustrate and explain them to us, not that any human Authority can add moment or weight to the Authority of God's Word; no, it is in this particular that we may apply that of St. Jerom, *Quid cum Psalterio Horatius, cum Apostolis Cicero?* and we may add what Credit or Reputation can *Athanasius* himself add to the Evangelists? But because the Customs of the first and purest Ages may possibly clear up and inform us in such
Dis-

Disputes, which is God's Word, by acquainting us with that Sense, in which the ancient Church received and understood such controverted Passages, in the purest Ages of our Religion: Certainly many dark Speeches in the Scriptures, which are not obvious to every unlearned Reader at this distance of time, were readily apprehended, when first delivered, because they might relate to some Speech or Principle, to some Error or Mistake of those People to whom they were spoken, who knowing the Occasion upon which they were uttered, wanted no Interpreter to expound their Intentions to them. Thus as to that part of our Faith which contains the Co-eternity of the Son, Christ's individual Substance, and eternal Relation to the Father; we find the *Jews* made no Boggle to take our Lord according to the common import of the Words, when he said he was the Son of God, but impeach'd him presently with Blasphemy, nay crucified him upon this very Accusation, that he made himself the Son of God, where the Silence and Submission of our Lord, who neither gainsaid nor contradicted that Impeachment, nay plainer still, his open reply to the High Priest, when he asked him and said unto him, *Art thou the Christ the Son of the blessed, namely I am*, as it is written in *St. Mark*, must be allowed to be the strongest acknowledgment in him, that he profest himself to be the Son of God in the same extent of the Words, as they had taken it, an Argument sufficient to stop the Mouths of the most inveterate Fighters against his Divinity: But the Lusts, and Pride, the Humors and Affectations of some of the earliest Christians

Christians put a stumbling Block in the way of 'after Ages, making all the Expressions of our Lord this way, Figurative, and Christ himself, like we our selves, only improperly, if not by Adoption, yet purely by way of Reward, and exaltation the Son of God; now how shall this Controversie be determin'd, by the bare Letter, and every private Man's Judgment of that Letter? It was this very private way of judging, which at first pestered the Church with this Dispute, and indeed with all other Heresies and Schisms: If every private Spirit may be able to judge and determine the point, how can we reject the earliest of Hereticks, who profess to ground their Interpretations upon this very bottom of Man's private Perswasions, and their own Sense of the Scriptures? If their private Spirits erred then in those early Days, then why may not thine, or mine, or any other Man's now, who shall press barely upon the Letter, and call in no other Light but his own Judgment to direct him in his Explication? At this rate, Men may set up the whole Medley of Heresies, *Arrian, Sabellian, Nestorian, and Socinian*, for Right and Orthodox, and the Divinity and Person of Christ become altogether as divided as the Multitude of Denominations of Hereticks about it: Must not therefore the Voice, and Practices, the Definitions and Creeds of God's most pure, ancient, and incorrupted Church, be our most rational and sure Instructor upon such Contentions, be a better security to lean upon, than any pretended Inspiration of the most gifted Professor?

It is true, the Apostles who received the gracious shower of God's holy Spirit descending like a mighty Wind, and lighting upon them, whilst they were in those blessed Circumstances, wanted neither Philosophers, nor Fathers to inform them in the Truth and Knowledge of God; but it follows not from such a Case as theirs was, that Fathers must even now be useless to us, or that those

Authors who liv'd in every Age of those disputes, which molest the Churches Peace at present, must be acknowledged no more able to speak the Sense of those times, than we our selves, after so many Centuries from them : May not Men with the same parity of Reason conclude, the Apostles wanted no Man to teach them Languages, who had been blest with the Gifts of Tongues, therefore there can be no need to provide Teachers now, to instruct the Children of Christians in the Knowledge of Languages, when no such Gifts appear.

Alas, what is it, which blunders willful Men, and renders them unable to comprehend the plainest Truths, but their undertaking to judge of such points, which they have had no means by Education, or otherways to comprehend : This is visible in the Controversie about Episcopacy, Men look into the Scriptures, see in them the promiscuous use of the words Bishop, and Presbyter, and find many Characters of the Powers and Qualities of Elders, and then apply all to their own Notions and use of the Words, in the common Concerns and Acceptations of the World, and so immediately conclude the divine Right of Church Government, to be invested in inferior Presbyters, and Lay-Elders, and consequently condemn God's own Institution, as Tyrannical and Antichristian ; whereas, had they look'd into the Histories of the Church, and consulted the Accounts of the faithfullest Writers in every one of the purest Centuries, nay in all Ages for Fifteen Hundred Years together, they must have learnt another Exposition, have seen the Impossibility and Inconsistency of such Notions, since they would have found no such Model as they now pretend to fetch from the Scriptures, in any one of them, no Church of Christ's so constituted and govern'd as they would have them, for Fifteen Hundred Ages, and by consequence have been brought long ago to this *Dilemma*;
either

either to deny their own Principles of Church Government, or own that the Christian Church subsisted so many Ages together without a Christian Ministry: Where then must Ignorance and the want of Letters leave us?

But you will say, are not many of the most learned Doctors, for instance, in the Church of *Rome*, at this day groveling in Errors, whilst many simple and illiterate Souls worship God in Truth? I answer, no doubt there are; but yet neither the Errors of the one, are owed to their Learning, nor the Orthodoxy of the other, due to their Ignorance, for to argue with Men in their own way, have not the most excellent parts, the most admirable Wits, and ablest of Men, degenerated into the veriest Hereticks, and Deceivers of the times they lived in? And yet I hope you will not say, that those excellent Gifts which came from God, were the Occasion, or real Cause of their relinquishing his Truths: It is not Learning which gives us the most captivating view of Truth, nor Wit, and Parts, which if rightly applied, prepare the understanding for our comprehending all its excellencies, which either naturally seduce to Error, or hold Men in such Corruptions, which are the fruits of folly; but the Case is manifest, the greatest and learnedest of Men, are made up of like Passions with the weakest of Mankind, and so stand exposed to the shocks of Pride or Prejudice, of Interest and Education, which too often makes a Prey of Reason, and leads the most accomplish'd Scholars in Captivity and Subjection: Without Learning we cannot be able to deal with a learned Adversary; but true Learning, which comprehends the Knowledge of all human and divine Perfections, as far as Reason can reach, and Revelation hath taught us, can never of itself set us the further off from coming unto God.

I am sure, we of this Nation, owe the highest of our Felicities to Letters, nay may ascribe our very Faith next

to God's Grace, to the Restauration of Learning within this Island: For when was it that our Fore-Fathers exercis'd the chiefeft acts of their Devotions, in cringings unto Croffes, and religious creepings by way of Adoration to dead Bodies, taken out of one Grave, to be what they called, translated to another, when was it that legendary Fables usurp'd the place of Scripture, that the most unaccountable Dreams of Fryars, were embraced as Oracles, and commanded the general Devotions of all Orders of Men? But in those Days of Ignorance, when as *Ingulphus* a Monk of *Croyland* records it, even in such a Diocess as *London*, there was not a Priest to be found, which was able to turn a Verse in the Latin Testament into his own Mother Tongue: Alas, how might we ever have discovered the Impostures of the pretended universal Supremacy of the Bishop of *Rome*, the Sophistry of Transubstantiation, the Whimsies of Purgatory, the Illusions and Artifices of all other Roman Forgeries and Fables, of which we find infinite Relations, even in their venerable *Bede*, and that not by way of his Censure, but Applause; how might we I say have had our Souls redeemed from such Snares of Superstition, had not the Opportunities of Schools and Universities, the present envy of Schismatics, revived the *Genius* and Spirit of our Nation, and dispelled the Clouds and Mists of Ignorance, which by its continued grossness had blacken'd the Minds of our Progenitors, and held them even in a necessity of believing a Lye? Err our Ancestors did, and erred we might have all for ever, had we continued ignorant of Languages, and the Age or two before us, consulted no ancients Fathers, than their present Confessors.

I remember *Clemens Alexandrinus*, with the greatest Vehemency, opposes that Resolution and Principle of the Heathen World, which obliged them to look upon it

as an Abomination, to suffer a change in the Religion of their Fathers, in the Customs bequeathed to them by their Ancestors upon any Cause whatever, as the main Pillar and only Support of their Heathen Fooleries, it is impossible says that Father, that ever any People should hate and fly from the greatest of Blessings that ever was bestowed upon Mankind, namely, the Knowledge and Worship of the true God revealed by Jesus Christ, were they not enthralled by such a senseless Resolution to hold every old Custom, though never so unreasonable: And *Athenagoras* in his Apology for the Christians addressed to the Emperor *Commodus*, openly upbraids the same Principle, nay powerfully demonstrates, that this was the Rock of all their Superstitions and Polutheism, and at last triumphantly concludes, that the downfall of all their absurd Deities, must be dated from the removal of that absurd Position, not doubting, if they would have made it lawful for Men to forego their ridiculous Customs, there would be no Plea left for their adhering to their ridiculous Gods. Now did not many of our Fore-fathers defend, and do not we our selves now find, such a monstrous Resolution as this revived, and most tenaciously defended at this day in the present Church of *Rome*? Is it not instilled into the Consciences of all her Members, that it is a most essential and necessary part of saving Faith, to believe just as that particular Church believes, a saving point of Faith, not to admit or hearken to any Change in any Ceremony, or Error, which by accident or design may have crope into that Communion, though such a Change be made according to the express Rule of God's Word; nay though the Errors to be chang'd, are apparently contradictory to the Truth of God's Word? Farther, are they not forbid under no less a Peril than Damnation, to look into the Scriptures, much more to believe any thing said in them, which may oppose the
pre-

present Principles of that Church, tho' it be as plain a Command as this of our Saviour, *Drink ye all of this*, so that whenever we address to any of them, in the name of our Lord Jesus, endeavouring to intreat them to be reconcil'd to the Cup of Blessing, they reply upon us as the *Romans* of old did upon St. *Paul*, when he preach'd to them Jesus, and the Resurrection, saying, you teach us Customs which it is not lawful for us to receive nor observe, being of the *Roman* Perswasion: Have not we then of this Kingdom great Reason to glorifie the Mercies of God, who has raised that generous and Christian Spirit in many pious Souls, which hath exprest its Love and Bounty to Mankind, in erecting many eminent Schools, and the most noble Foundations of Learning,, nay must not a reflection upon the Rise, and Foundation of that very School, wherein we here assembled, received the most excellent Education, fill us with the most astonishing Consideration of God's infinite unsearchable Wisdom, and make us sensible of the admirable Fruits and Influences of true Learning, when we remember how many useful Professors, how many able Defenders of the pure Truths of Christ, have been bred up, and actually sent into the World from this Foundation, which was originally intended for the Services of *Roman* Superstition and Error: Ignorance may decry such Blessings as these, and they who would enslave the World by their own Fancies and Conceits, may make a mock of Languages and Fathers, but as the Circumstances of *Christendom* now stand, 'tis by Learning, and Learning alone, I mean Learning subjected to the Grace of God, and Foundation of his Word, by which Men may be made capable to escape out of those Errors, and corrupt Customs of their Fathers, which may have been imprinted upon their Minds, by the long and customary Traditions of Deceivers: And it is in this Case that we may most properly apply these prudent

prudent Sentences of Solomon. *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning: And then again, Receive my Instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice Gold.*

To make all suitable to our present meeting, I beg leave to offer one word of my Thoughts, as to what Purposes and Inclinations must be most fit and becoming in it. Now in my Judgment, the use and advantages of all such yearly meetings, as this of ours, may be very great and really become of mighty use to our Nation, as well as honourable to our School, if we would not satisfy ourselves merely in meeting once a Year, and contracting such an outward slight Knowledge of one another, as extends no farther than the Face or Person, but every one mutually engage, in acquainting our selves with the several appointments and circumstances of each other. I mean the Employments, Trades, and Occupations which each Man is settled in and applied to in the World, that so, wherever we may any of us, either by accident, or our own larger acquaintance and interests, or by the very Nature of our Employments be serviceable to any one of our School-fellows, we may with chearfulness use our Care and Applications for the improvement and furtherance of his Success: Such a united Application as this, must have its universal Benefits, and be every particular Man's happiness and advantage: For by our numbers we must be determin'd to various ways of Business, and have a Friend almost of every Profession, and therefore as one calling must be helpful to, or be dependent upon another, and this Man's way have many occasions for the Commodities which that Man deals in, so such a Christian *Genius* of Love, and mutual Obligations, may spread its grateful Influencies to every Person, and each Man reap the Consolations of every Mans help in his turn: Thus must the prosperous be hasten'd to the Perfection of Prosperity, and the very

unlucky himself, unlucky perhaps, purely for want of acquaintance and friendships in the World, in a little time add one to the number of the prosperous: Thus our Feast may rise to the primitive Spirit, and Use, and Reputation of the first Feasts of Love in the Church of Christ, when they were in their purest Innocency and Esteem with the Saints of God: Thus must the effects of our Feasts be as engaging, as those Hours we formerly in our tenderest Years spent together, in our Study or Recreations, and like them settle the most lasting friendship, and good Will amongst all: Thus must such seasonable Feasts as this, lay a Foundation to reform, and shame that Inhumanity and ill Nature, which seems at present to have seized Mankind, especially the richer, and more considerable ranks of Men, who have been taught by some late Modes and Fashions of the Age, to break off all the endearments of Relation, by breaking through those more excellent and human Customs of owning our Relations in the face of the World, which Men pervert now adays, by saluting their nearest Kindred, as they do the greatest Strangers, leaving out the stile of Cosen, even there where the Alliance is derived from Blood: A Mode which owes its beginning and progress, to nothing but Pride, or Covetousness, or Inhumanity, there being no other Reason to be given for it, but because such Men know, that did the World understand they had such Relations, they must stand obliged in honour to serve, and promote their Interests and Pretensions, whereas it appears that their generous Souls had much rather an unfortunate part of their own Blood should starve, and sink in Infamy, than they spend a Moments Sollicitation to set it creditable and easie: Thus will the Relation of School-fellow engage beyond Nature itself, nay repair such Declensions of Nature, and fill the Souls of Men with the most sweet and blissful Inclinations of Charity and Goodness to one another. May this be the effect of our Feast, and may the Almighty God of Heaven prosper you all.

10 AP60

F I N I S.

